

also, I believe, confirmed by Munshi ABDULLAH in his "Hikayat," but I cannot, at present, refer to the book.

The idea of a Batin being sent on such a mission will make Malays, or those acquainted with their manners and customs, smile; but it is very possible that Batin SAPI accompanied the "noblemen" mentioned above.

W. H. R.

---

### LATAH.

I have received several communications from different quarters upon the subject of my recent paper on *Latah*. On one point, my correspondents seem to be agreed, viz., that the omission of Chinese from the list of residents in the Straits who are afflicted with *Latah*, is due to my defective observation.

It would shew great presumption were I to say definitely that those who have favoured me with their criticism are wrong in their opinion; but it would be equally false humility on my part to admit its correctness, upon the data which lie before me.

In no case have any reasons been given for the assumption that I am in error; nor are any particularised instances referred to by which such error might be corrected or modified.

And I may add, with candour, but I trust without offence, that many of my recent correspondents have had neither length of time, nor favourable opportunities, in Malaya, sufficient to warrant the formation of their very definitely expressed opinions.

---

I am told by all who have written to me that numbers of Chinese in the Straits are imitative *Latahs*. I am indeed told by one writer that such cases are "numberless."

It could hardly have escaped my notice that there are many Chinese in this country who imitate the words and jestures of others. But this is true of many people in all countries.

It is true of some monkeys \* and of a large proportion of vulgar children. †

But I repeat that, after careful observation, I have not met with any Chinaman in the Straits whom I should describe as *Latah*.

My remarks upon this section of my former paper were, no doubt, crude and unsatisfactory. But I remember saying that this division of *Latah* subjects must not be roughly described as "village idiots."

Now, I should baldly describe all the Chinese in whom I have noticed this propensity as distinctly microcephalic.

In two very marked cases which have come under my notice in the last three years, and which, for some time, perplexed me in this very connection, one patient has died insane in the charge of his friends in Penang, and the other is now an inmate of the Lunatic Asylum in Singapore. I can say, with confidence, that these two are the only instances I have met in which I have had any doubt as to the absence of *Latah* amongst the Chinese.

That this imitative propensity is common both as the precursor and the accompaniment of certain forms of mental disorder, is well known.

"In certain morbid states of the brain," says Dr. BATEMAN in his work on Aphasia, ‡ "this tendency is exaggerated to an extraordinary degree: some hemiplegic patients and others, at the commencement of inflammatory softening of the brain, *unconsciously* § imitate every word which is uttered, whether in their own or a foreign language, and every gesture or action which is performed near them."||

---

\* Noticeably Cercopithecus.

† Those who read my former paper will be prepared to hear that I deny the existence of *Latah* before pubescence, while I admit, as an inexplicable fact, that, where present, it is persistent in both sexes long after the powers of reproduction are extinct, and, in the case of women, as a rule, ends only with life itself.

‡ Ed. 1870, p. 110.

§ There is no unconsciousness, mesmeric or idiotic, in the actions of a *Latah*.

|| Similarly *vide* VOËT's "Mémoire sur les Microcéphales" *passim*, especially p. 169, Ed. 1867.

I cannot speak from experience of the ultimate fate of any *Latah* of the imitative class. But I can say confidently that the exhibition of this peculiarity is unaccompanied by any other mental irregularity, except those which I have attempted to describe as pertaining to *Latah*. And in those cases which I have had the opportunity of observing for any length of time, I have satisfied myself that the malady is not progressive.

Further, I have seen many oldish men thus *Latah* who, according to the testimony of their elders, have been so afflicted from the age of puberty.

And lastly, I have never heard an "orang latah" called an "orang gila." Nor have I ever heard any man say of one so diseased, "He will become mad," or "He will die."

For these and other reasons, apart from my own theory on the subject, I am led to believe that this propensity in *Latahs* is an anomaly, distinct from a not uncommon mental disease in other parts of the world, to which it bears some superficial resemblance.

And, until proof is given to the contrary, I rest content with my belief that the peculiarity is one in which the Chinese have no share.

It must be, at all times, dangerous for the unscientific to argue from apparent similarities, the causes of which must be hidden from them.

As I have written as a non-scientist, I must add that I am quite alive to the parallel danger I am running in pointing out differences which stand merely upon the basis of my own unlearned and limited observation.

---

What *Latah* really is, it remains for some future pathologist to say.

But until "the man has spoken with authority," I trust that no half formed and rash generalization will be suffered to class the imitative Malay with the microcephalic idiot: our snake seer with the victim of alcohol; the rarely found Malay girl-sufferer with the ordinary nympho-maniac; in a word, the unexplained *Latah* with the *Lunatic*, whose mental disorders have now formed the subject of the specialist's investigations for several generations.

H. A. O'BRIEN.